

Demand-responsive services and culturally sustainable enterprise in remote Aboriginal settings: A Case Study of the Myuma Group

Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies Conference

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'The malaise in Australian Aboriginal communities is widely acknowledged but the economic conditions which exacerbate it - even when ostensibly designed to help - are little understood. I wish to explore what kind of 'economy' has supported, and might continue to support, forms of distinctive cultural practice and its reproduction over time.'

(Gaynor MacDonald, University of Sydney, 9/10/07.)

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This monograph was written as a contribution to the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DKCRC) during 2007 to 2009, and specifically to its Core Project 5 (CP5) on 'Desert Services that Work, Demand Responsible Approaches to Desert Settlements'. The overall aim of this project was to provide guidance on how to enhance Aboriginal livelihoods in desert settlements through improved access to and effectiveness of services. This project sat within the broader aim of the DKCRC, namely to create economic opportunities for desert people and make a demonstrable difference for remote Aboriginal communities through the application of research and training. The current case study sits within the nexus of these two aims statements. Acknowledgements to those many people who assisted with writing this paper, including the two successive Team Leaders of CP5, Mark Moran and Steve Fisher for their insightful critiques of the draft manuscript.

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Desert Knowledge CRC Research – Core Project 5 – Demand-driven Service Delivery

The five key research questions of Core Project 5:

- What are the characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of service, according to the perceptions of consumers and service providers engaged at the local interface?
- What are the conditions that permit successful practice to develop between consumers and service-providers?
- At what scales of governance should different service delivery functions be assigned to optimise both demand and supply based criteria?
- What are the service type and delivery style priorities of consumers within a specified budget framework, and what is their capacity to participate and willingness to contribute to services?
- What are the critical issues and strategies to improve the service system, including the strengths and weaknesses of different technology and governance options?

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Operational location of Myuma Group



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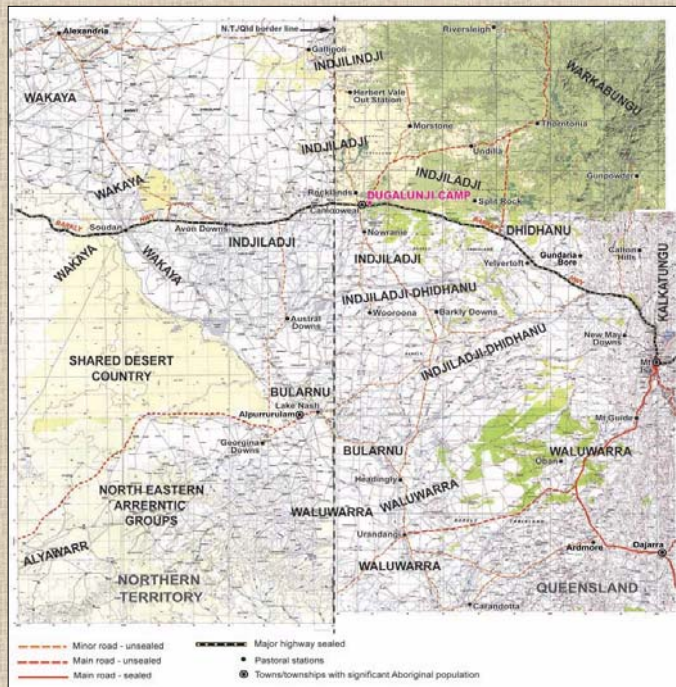


The upper Georgina River contains three large lakes that are the sacred sites of the Indjilandji/Dhidhanu people.



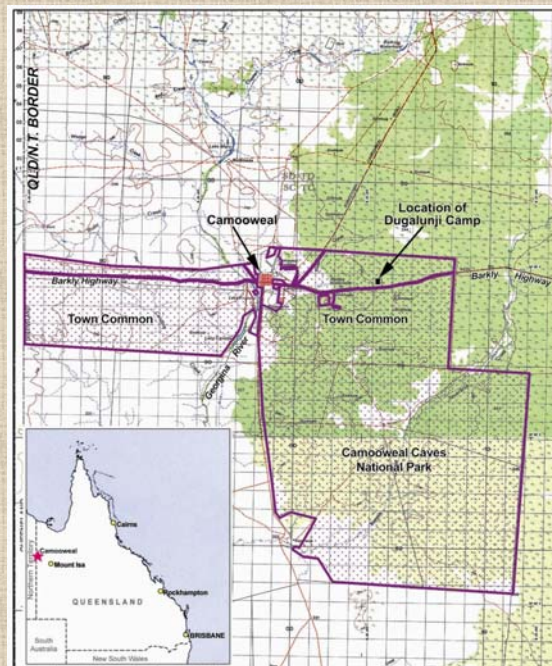
The Camooweal Caves are all sacred sites of the Indjilandji/Dhidhanu people.

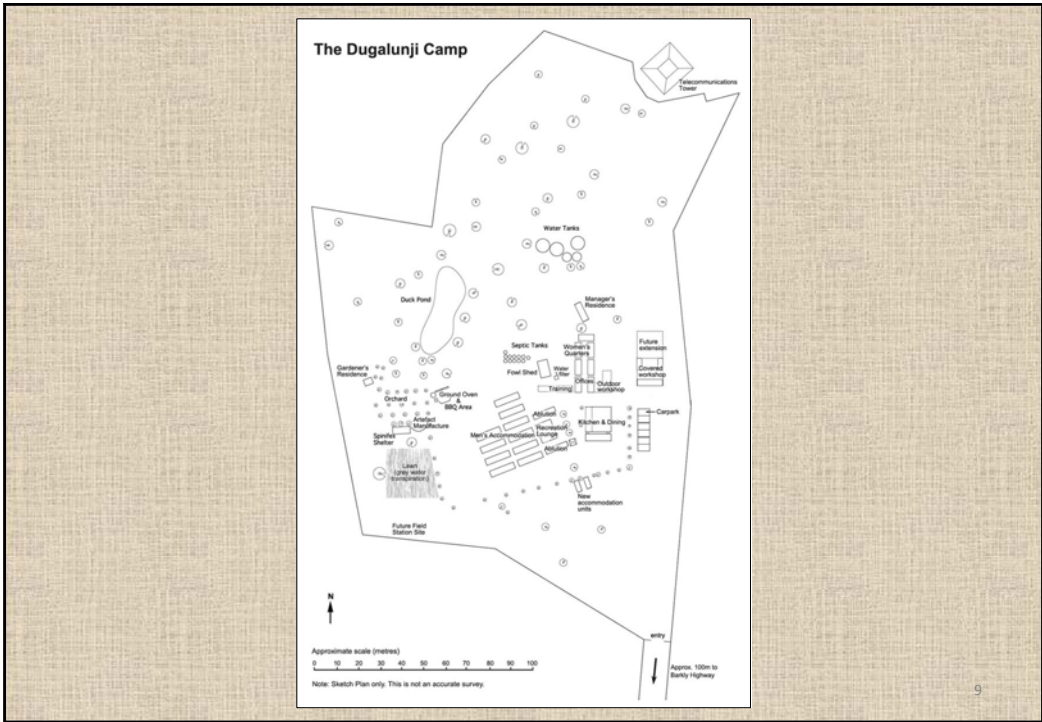
The operational region of the Myuma Group showing the various local language groups.



Indjilandji Native Title Application for Camooweal showing location of Dugalunji Camp.

(Area of Application = 263 sq km).







The old Georgina River Bridge in front of the new bridge.



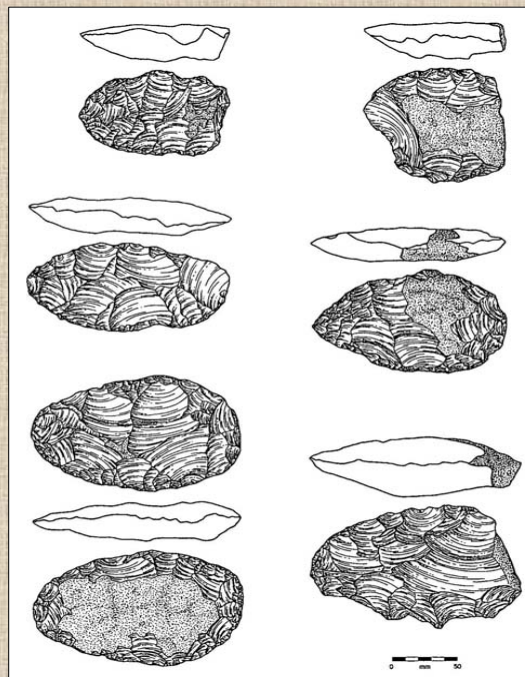
Georgina Bridge Opening with Mrs Ruby Saltmere in centre.



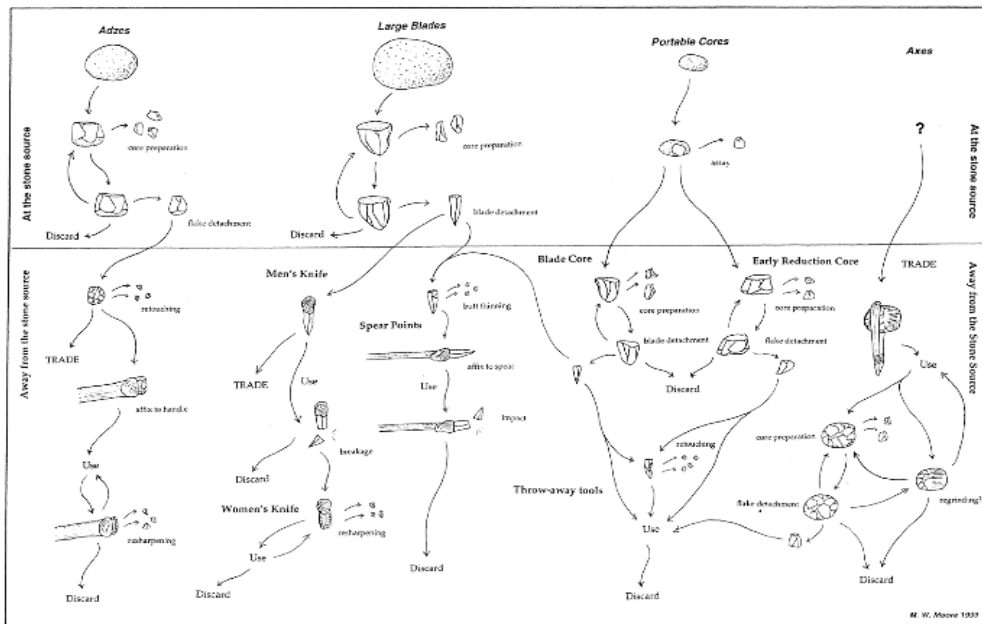
Barkly Highway upgrade, installation of bridge footings and piers.

Biface stone implements from upper Georgina River and Nowranie Creek. Manufacturing skills for these tools are maintained by Colin Saltmere.

(Source: Dr Mark Moore).



Flow Chart of Seymour River Stoneworking, North-west Queensland



(Illustration by Dr Mark W. Moore, 1999)

The three corporate vehicles of the Myuma Group and their respective spheres of operation.

CORPORATE VEHICLE	SPHERE OF OPERATIONS
Myuma Pty Ltd	Economic enterprises, training
Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation	Cultural Heritage, Native Title, land and riverine management
Rainbow Gateway Ltd	Social, welfare and charitable projects

Charter of the Split Rock Inca Alliance for Main Roads reconstruction of part of Barkly Highway.

FOUNDATION WORKSHOP
Split Rock Inca Alliance

MAIN ROADS Queensland Government

MYUMA PTY LTD

SEYMOUR WHYTE

SPLIT ROCK INCA ALLIANCE CHARTER

Mission Statement
"The Split Rock Inca Alliance will work together with local communities to deliver the final \$5.4bn of the Barkly Highway Upgrade. The Alliance will exceed the expectations of all stakeholders and will leave a lasting benefit for the people of Northern Australia."

Objectives

(a) **Performance Objectives**

- ✓ The Split Rock Inca Alliance will be seen as a model alliance.
- ✓ Time, cost, quality and safety targets will be beaten.
- ✓ Cultural Heritage and environmental expectations will be exceeded.
- ✓ The FFO Training Model will be left as an outstanding legacy.
- ✓ Innovation and creative ideas will be promoted and supported.

(b) **Relationship Objectives**

- ✓ The cultures of those involved in the Alliance will be respected.
- ✓ Decisions are made on a "best for project" basis.
- ✓ Communications are always open, frank and honest.
- ✓ The Alliance Team will be fully integrated and will achieve very high performances.
- ✓ Personal achievement will be fostered and promoted.

The Values Practiced by Team Members

- ✓ Respect for individual ideas, beliefs and attitudes.
- ✓ Open, honest communication.
- ✓ Innovative thinking.
- ✓ Frankness and honesty.
- ✓ A supportive culture.
- ✓ Shared accountability.

The Principles Shaping the Alliance Agreement

- ✓ Through our efforts, we all win or we all lose.
- ✓ We will share responsibility for our decisions and actions.
- ✓ All opinions are valid but we all support the final decision.
- ✓ All decisions are the best for alliance outcomes.
- ✓ We will provide/ find the right people, advice and resources to get the job done.
- ✓ Transactions will be open book.
- ✓ We will encourage innovative thinking.
- ✓ We will extend ourselves by setting and planning to achieve breakthrough targets.
- ✓ We will promote open, honest communication.
- ✓ We will support alliance participants to help deliver outcomes.

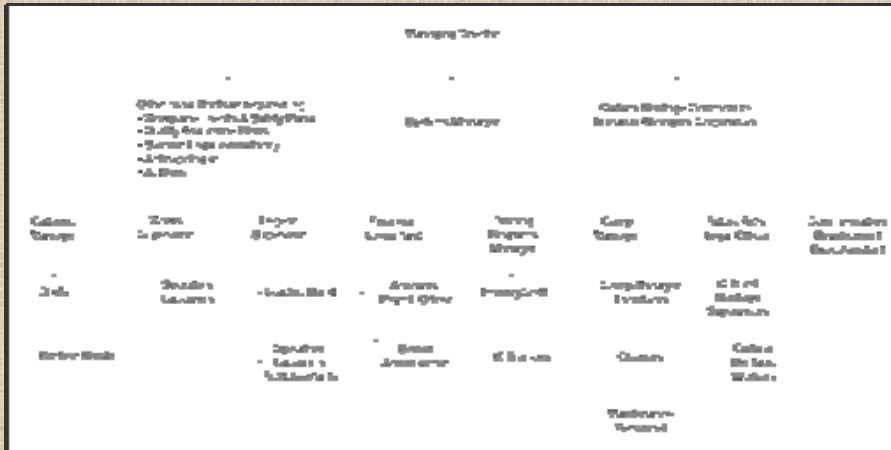
04 February 2006

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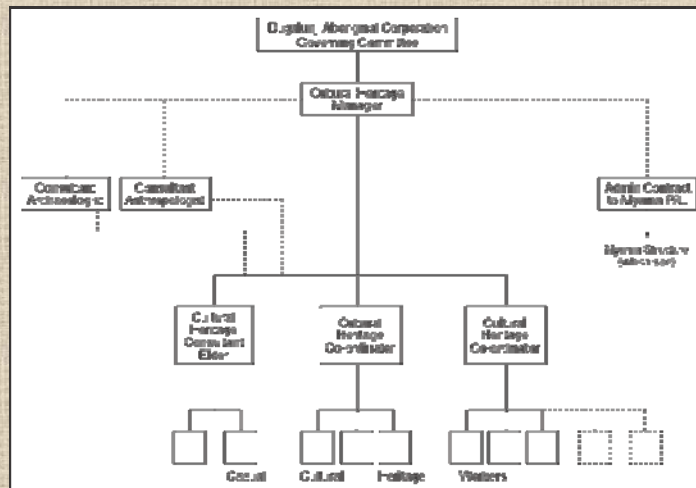
Major Myuma Commercial Contracts during 2001-2009

Contract	Time Period	Myuma Group Contract Share	Peak Myuma Employment	Project Works Description	Project Partners
Georgina River Bridge Alliance	Mar.01- Dec. 02	\$1.4 million	40	Major bridge construction, highway reconstruction (labour hire, minor plant hire); Training management services; Catering/cleaning services for 60-person camp; Cultural heritage services	Qld Dept of Main Roads (client); RoadTek, Barclay-Mowlem (Total Project value \$20 million)
Nowranie Creek Alliance (Barkly Highway)	June 04- Dec. 04	\$5.9 million	38	Highway and bridge reconstruction, (labour hire, minor plant hire); Training management services; Catering/cleaning services for 60-person camp; Quarry manufacture and supply of 90 000T pavement material to site; Fencing construction (30.5 km); Cultural heritage services	Qld Dept of Main Roads (client); Leighton Contractors Pty Ltd (Total Project value \$19.7 million)
Gravel Supply (Split Rock Inca Barkly Highway Upgrade)	Dec. 05-Oct. 06	\$500 000	5	Quarry manufacture and supply of 235 000T pavement material	Qld Dept of Main Roads (client); Lawlor Contracting Pty Ltd (Total Project value \$5.8mill)
Fencing (Split Rock/ Carleton Creek Barkly Highway upgrade)	June- Dec. 2005	\$300 000	12	Fencing construction (60 km)	Qld Dept of Main Roads (client)
Fencing (Inca Creek/ Yelvertoft Road (Barkly Highway upgrade)	July 06- Dec. 06	\$200 000	8	Fencing construction (35 km)	Qld Dept of Main Roads (client)
Split Rock Inca Alliance (Barkly Highway)	Apr. 06- Nov. 06	\$5.1 million	52	Highway and bridge reconstruction, (labour hire, heavy plant hire); Training management services; Catering/cleaning services for 60-person camp; Cultural heritage services	Qld Dept of Main Roads (client); Seymour Whyte Constructions Pty Ltd (Total Project value \$33.8 million)
Gilbert River Construction Camp	Aug.- Dec. 07	\$675 000	12	Construction of remote accommodation camp for 30 persons	RoadTek
Gregory Downs-Camooweal Road Upgrade	July 07- June 08	\$1.07 million	10	Reconstruction of the Camooweal-Gregory Downs road	RoadTek
Misc. Roadworks	July 07- June 08	\$292 000	8	Upgrading of sections of Barkly Highway, Camooweal-Urandangi Road, Camooweal township roads	RoadTek, Mount Isa City Council
Miscellaneous Labour Hire	July 07- June 08	\$532 000	8	Labour hire for mining, exploration, civil and building construction clients	Xstrata, Rio Tinto Alcan, Inceite, Pivot, CBE Capital, Barkly All Trades
Gregory Downs-Camooweal Road Upgrade	July 08- June 09	\$2.19 million	12	Reconstruction of the Camooweal-Gregory Downs road	RoadTek/Department of Main Roads
D-Two Phosphate Exploration Project	Aug. 08-June 09	\$1.4 million	20	Provision of site camp, catering/accommodation services, labour and plant hire, access road construction	Legend International Holdings Inc.
Miscellaneous Labour Hire	July 08- June 09	\$200 000	8	Labour hire for mining and civil construction clients	Rio Tinto Alcan, Inceite Pivot, Boral Asphalt

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The Myuma Staff Structure



The Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation Staff Structure

Myuma's contribution to its regional economy during the five years, 2004-2009.

Financial year	Contribution to Local Economy
2004-05	\$3.6 million
2005-06	\$4.2 million
2006-07	\$6.1 million
2007-08	\$3.6 million
2008-09	\$4.2 million
Total (five years)	\$21.7 million

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Profile of Myuma employees, May 2006

Language Group/Place of Normal Residence	Aboriginal			Non-Aboriginal		
	Male	Female	Sub-total	Male	Female	Sub-total
Groups in the Georgina River Basin Catchment						
Alyawarr/Lake Nash & N.T.	7	3	10			
Indjalandji-Dhidhanu/Georgina River	3	2	5			
Waanyi/Nicholsen River, Lawn Hill	4		4			
Wakaya/N.T.	3	1	4			
Kalkadoon/Mt Isa	3		3			
Bularnu/Georgina River	1		1			
Warlwarra/Georgina River	1		1			
Pitta Pitta/Georgina River	1		1			
Groups in the Wider Cultural Region						
Wangkanguru/Simpson Desert	1		1			
Eastern Arrernte/N.T.	2		2			
Warumungu/N.T.	3		3			
Kaytej/N.T.	1		1			
People from Distant Places						
North Queensland	1		1		1	1
South-East Queensland					3	3
Rural New South Wales				1	1	2
Papua New Guinea					1	1
SUB-TOTALS:	32	6	38	1	6	7

Note: The classification by language group is simplified for the sake of illustration, in reality most individuals have a genealogical connection to several language groups if one traces back past their grandparents.

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Myuma's Marketing Book
(Memmott and Sheldon 2007)

The Myuma Group

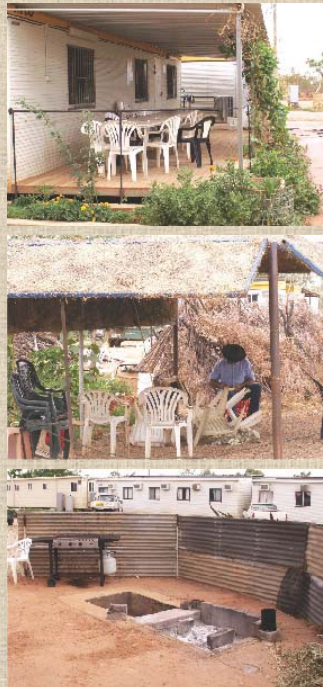
Georgina River Basin



Aboriginal Enterprise, Training & Cultural Heritage

1

The Dugalunji Camp near Camooweal showing (top) verandah to dining hall, (middle) the outdoor artefact manufacturing area, (bottom) the barbeque and ground oven cooking facility with men's quarters behind.



2

Concept and deployment of the 'Aboriginal service setting'

The Dugalunji Camp can be considered to be what could be called an 'Aboriginal service setting' (as opposed to a government service setting or a commercial service setting). An Aboriginal service setting can be defined as one that is controlled by Aboriginal people and is designed to be comfortable for Aboriginal consumers. This can be achieved through a combination of behavioural patterns and environmental and artifactual features, including setting controls which are designed to be relatively predictable, secure and conducive for Aboriginal people to use. There is also a sense of identity with and even ownership of such a setting by Aboriginal people when the service is being delivered in an effective way.

Although I have here employed the term 'Aboriginal service setting' to describe the Dugalunji Camp; it is more accurately an intercultural setting with a dominance of Aboriginal behavioural patterns and with ultimate Aboriginal control and management. It reflects an Aboriginal demand-driven form of cultural appropriateness.

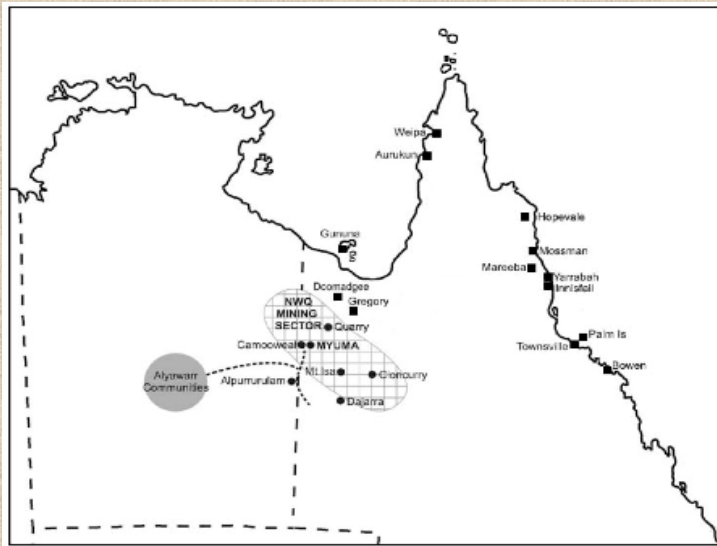
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Myuma's pre-vocational training outcomes, 2007-2009

Training Semester (13 week course)	Trainee Entering			Trainees Graduating			Trainees Employed	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Obtained employment	Remained in continuous employment for 6 months
2007, semester 1	10	2	12	8	2	10	7	2
2007, semester 2	14	6	20	10	6	16	10	6
2008, semester 1	26	4	30	23	3	26	20	8
2008, semester 2	24	6	30	19	6	25	16	8*
2009, semester 1	26	4	30	24	4	28	16	n/a*
Totals	100	22	122	84	21	105	69	24*

Note: The asterisk indicates that employment outcomes are ongoing – ie. Some placements have not yet reached the six month mark.

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Myuma's sociospacial field of Aboriginal clientele includes (i) the local region, NWQ; (ii) the Alyawarr region, NT, and (iii) further communities in north Qld from which trainees are conscripted.

The Mt Isa Region Industry and Infrastructure Key Managers Forum:

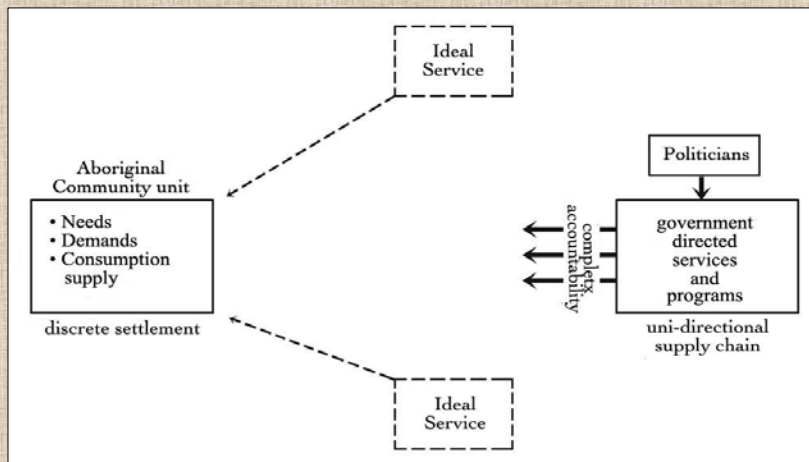
- The Myuma Group
- Current contract partners (e.g., road construction contractors, mining companies, government departments)
- Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (Qld)
- Department of Education, Training & the Arts (Qld)
- Department of State Development & Innovation (Qld)
- Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (Cth)
- Job Network providers
- Mount Isa Institute of TAFE (MIIT)
- Queensland Apprenticeship Services (QAS)
- Construction Training Queensland (CTQ) and Mining Industry Skills Centre (MISC)
- Centrelink.



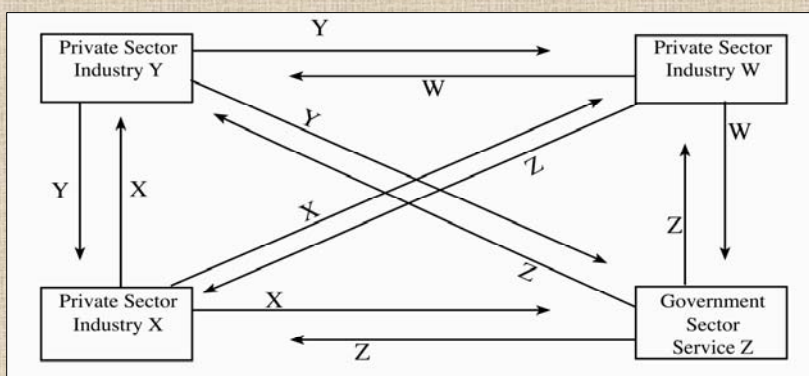
Aboriginal students from North Queensland attending a pre-vocational course hosted by the Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation in Camooweal, conduct a controlled winter burn of University of Queensland spinifex plots as part of experimental harvesting research at Wuruna. (Photo by Dr Susanne Schmidt, August 2008.)



Camp Elder, Muscly Tommy on left with trainees after cladding a shelter structure with spinifex as part of UQ ARC Discovery Project.



At the beginning of the DK-CP5 Project - the basic model of the remote Aboriginal community as a passive recipient of welfare with negligible engagement with the market despite being a customer. Certain needs often remain unfulfilled from the uni-directional supply of government sponsored services. CP5 was initially concerned with how demand-driven service delivery could be attained by such a community.



The Market Participation Model - complex demand and supply chains and networks

- If I am to supply X in the market, I have to demand Y goods and Z services. However the entities that supply Y and Z also want my supply of X, or alternatively want me to maintain the supply of X which stimulates the trade of their goods and services in other parts of the market.
- Thus demand is partly driven by the capacity to supply (not just consume) and by the reciprocal appreciation of the mutual demands and needs for one another's services.
- Accountability becomes more lateralized (as market place performance) than vertical (top-down service to bottom-up demand).
- A key problem for Aboriginal groups is how to insert themselves into the market in this way.

In the theoretical literature on human consumption, this more complex set of market relationships is termed 'productive consumption'. Thus the "act of productions is therefore in all its moments also an act of consumption...Production as directly identical with consumption, and consumption as directly coincident with production..." (Marx 2001:32 (1974)).

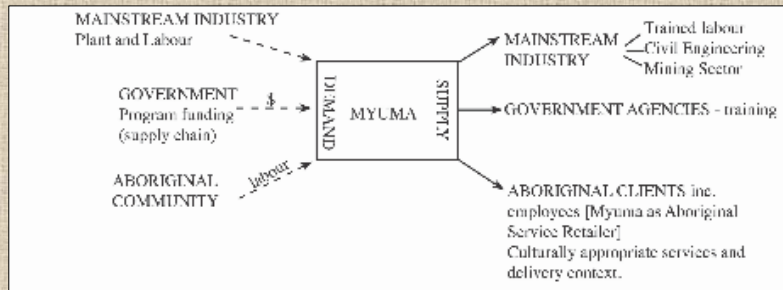
A key challenge for Aboriginal groups is how to 'lever' themselves out of welfare dependency and to insert themselves into the market in this way, without readily-available, substantial 'starting-up' resources.

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The characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of services

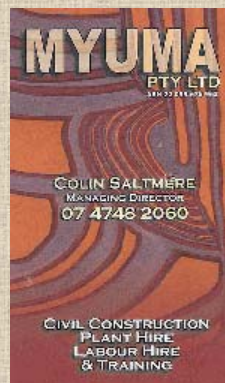
The interplay characteristics of the Myuma modus operandi involve the following components:- (i) Attract a large-scale contract with government or private enterprise that can be fulfilled with largely Aboriginal labour; (ii) host the Aboriginal labour on-site with accommodation, meals and a social environment that is culturally appropriate, so that the employees are reasonably comfortable; (iii) provide accessible training courses to the labour pool relevant to the work experience, so there is added value for the employees and so that the labour force acquire ongoing diverse skill sets, (iv) identify the consumer needs of the workforce and invite suppliers to visit the Work Camp at various times to fulfil some of those needs, either by educating the employee-consumer about the availability of the service, or by delivering the service in-situ at the Camp; and (v) attract more enterprise and training contracts to achieve a stable continuity of employment, training and hence accompanying ongoing service provision.

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Myuma as the complex Indigenous adaptive system.

A Myuma business card with corporate logo designed by artist and co-Director Ms Shirley Macnamara.





Colin Saltmere, an Indjiladji leader and Director of Myuma Pty Ltd at Camooweal, demonstrating the skill of hafting a stone spear tip to a wooden shaft with spinifex resin, after manufacturing these components.
(Photo by Paul Memmott, 2008.)



Spinifex Vessel

Artist: Shirley Macnamara

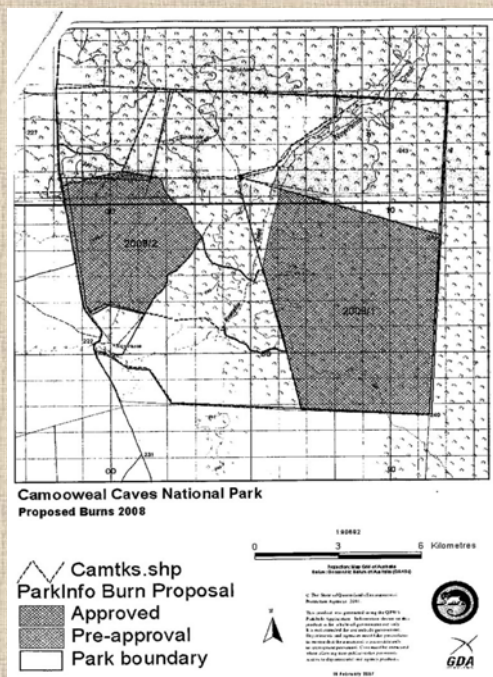
(An Indjiladji traditional owner of upper Georgina River area).

Spinifex grass (*Triodia longiceps*) runners, yellow ochre, waxed thread and synthetic polymer fixative.

July 1997



Service delivery by Colin Saltmere of Dugalunji Aboriginal Corporation at Camooweal – running a cultural induction workshop for a minerals exploration and drilling team under a spinifex bough shed with a kit of stone tool manufacturing materials. (Photo by Paul Memmott, 2008.)



The relationship between Myuma's activities and Aboriginal law

'Ours is a market-civilisation, theirs not. Indeed, there is a sense in which The Dreaming and The Market are mutually exclusive' (Stanner 1979:58).

Despite Stanner's and Pearson's views, the strong commitment to law and culture continues to permeate through the Dugalunji Camp on a daily basis through:

- (i) the visitation and residence of regional Elders who engage in customary activities;
- (ii) the regular contracting of cultural heritage services to industry;
- (iii) cultural induction programmes for local industry workers;
- (iv) workshops on cultural identity strengthening for prevocational trainees;
- (v) the involvement of the Indjalandji in regional Aboriginal ceremonies; and
- (vi) an ongoing program of Indjalandji sacred site recording.

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Critical components of the Myuma success story

1. Colin Saltmere's special leadership skills in being not only able to successfully influence and negotiate in the mainstream government and business world, but also simultaneously earning the respect from Aboriginal people as being a customary law authority and leader in the Aboriginal world.
2. A strong lobbying process by Myuma amongst the employer sector (mining and construction industries, state and local governments), combined with the respect of the employer sector for Myuma having made a success in business enterprises.
3. This has resulted in Myuma becoming part of the local and regional economic market, which explains its capacity to secure selected and culturally-modified demand service needs from the government and business sectors.
4. Pre-vocational training in an Aboriginal-run and controlled work camp where most cross-cultural blockages and intimidations experienced by trainees can be worked through with a trusting training team.
5. Closing the gap: 'not just job readiness, but having jobs ready' for the Aboriginal trainees; again a function of Myuma's good standing in the economic market.

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Further success factors revealed in the preceding analysis include:

- effective business strategy and gearing up, including through maintaining three business units for different purposes;
- availability of key skills and competencies, including through partnership;
- a capacity to deal with all forms of Aboriginal politics;
- enterprise capacity and ability to keep attracting contracts;
- tendering as much as lobbying;
- good management and governance;
- reliable incoming goods and services despite its remote location;
- strong identity and associated 'brand'; and
- a network of 'trusted outsiders' to provide support, advice and to 'open doors' for the Myuma Group.